

SAVVY AND EXPERIENCE

The 40th Military Police Company proves it has it all, during its deployment at Fort Lewis, Washington.

With his powerful frame and strong, silent demeanor, Sergeant First Class Michael Barros of the California Army National Guard's 40th Military Police Company cuts an imposing figure. But it's his experience with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department that garners Barros the most attention from the active duty MPs he has joined for a yearlong Homeland Security deployment at Fort Lewis. "When they know you're from the 40th Infantry Division, the first thing they want to know is, 'Are you a cop?'" Barros said. "It's the first question — every time."

Of the 145 California MPs deployed to Fort Lewis, at least 35 have civilian law-enforcement backgrounds. That makes them objects of interest and de facto mentors to their younger, often less experienced, regular Army counterparts. "We bring over a lot of life experience, so the active duty soldiers are always curious as to what the civilian world is like, because a lot of them want to be civilian law-enforcement officers," Barros said.

From the enlisted soldier with a career in the Drug Enforcement Agency to a commander who is also a supervisor with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the 40th MP Company is a treasure trove of real-world law-enforcement savvy. The situation has been a big help for the 504th Military Police Battalion, the active duty unit that the 40th MPs have been attached to since their arrival at Fort Lewis in September. "They jumped right in and took over this mission for us," said Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Tatum, commander of the 504th. "They're very professional, very courteous, but they get the work done." That work ranges from checking identifications and inspecting cars at the Fort Lewis gates to patrolling its tree-lined roads.

Fort Lewis has a military and civilian population of more than 25,000. Located in scenic western Washington, it brings a real change of pace for 40th MP soldiers used to watching some of the nation's meanest streets in their civilian lives. It also brings a whole new set of rules. "For one, military law enforcement has no jurisdiction over civilians. Cases involving nonmilitary members are often handed over to the local police," said Corporal Irvin DeRoche, who is also a member of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. Also, when soldiers are arrested on post, they are often released to their commanders for disciplinary action, rather than sitting in jail waiting for a court date. "The potential for a bad incident to come around is very high in the military, given that you could have arrested the same person once before," DeRoche said. Also, at a crime scene, the role of an MP is much more limited than it is in civilian law enforcement, where massive caseloads and thin headquarter staffs often dictate some additional footwork by

By First Lieutenant Thomas Mullen
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Checking IDs at Fort Lewis' gate is just one of the many duties and responsibilities of the 40th Military Police Company.

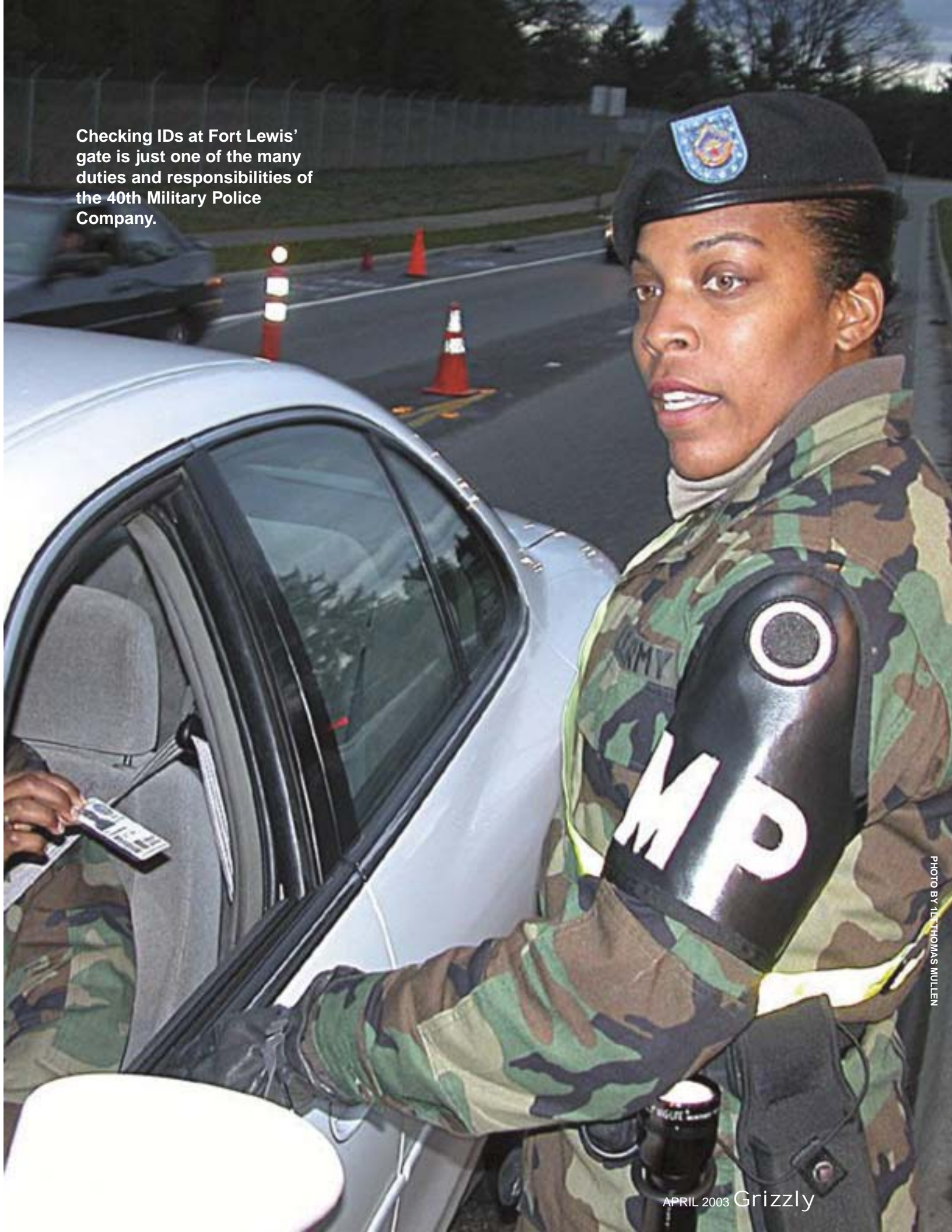


PHOTO BY 1LT THOMAS MULLEN

the arresting officer,” DeRoche added.

“Patrol officers in the military go out and all they do is take a report,” DeRoche said. “Civilian patrols, on the other hand, go out and they actually do an initial investigation before an investigator gets the case.”

“While the peculiarities of regular Army culture may be new to someone steeped in civilian policing techniques, real-world police experience is definitely a benefit in the realm of military police,” said Captain Mark Jennings, commander of the 40th Military Police Company.

He said, MPs who face tragedies and major crimes day-to-day as civilian law enforcers are less likely to let their guard down, no matter the level of security on post.



PHOTO BY MSG JIM OBER

The 40th Military Police Company gained valuable experience responding to the Los Angeles Riots in April 1992.

“I think we understand the perspective that you never know who you’re running across,” Jennings said. “You kind of anticipate, sometimes, that everybody coming onto a military installation is a good person, but I think our guys realize that when you pull over a car, or you have someone come through the gate – even if they have that military decal or dependent ID card – they aren’t automatically a good guy.” 🐾